

Farewell to True "Friends"

Well, it's hard to believe, because it seems like they've always been here, but Lee and Marilyn Russell have packed up and moved to northeast Georgia. This wasn't an easy decision, because they truly love the Everglades (and especially the Fakahatchee), but last summer was pretty unbearable, and the grandkids are now closer, so off they went. When the Russells decide to act, look out, it's done. This was so true here, too, which is how the boardwalk got into such good shape, with the pressure cleaning, and the repairs, and the interpretive signs. Who else could have got all this done in such short order?

And then there's the swamp buggy modifications. This job may have taken the better part of the summer, but Lee tackled the job almost single-handedly. And what about all those weekends



at the boardwalk, making sure the visitors got the most out of their visit, offering tons of information and "renting" binoculars? And their picture boards, with dozens of orchids and other native

plants, as well as the eagles and snakes and bears and bobcats and baby alligators and soft-shelled turtles laying eggs (and the grand prize of all, the Florida panther). And the Junior Ranger Program they started, and the books and literature they sold and handed out? And all the hours copying the boardwalk booklets, and all those Thursdays riding up and down Janes Scenic Drive collecting road kill data for Mike Owen? And all those days spent on ATVs doing well surveys, or those days on foot doing tram surveys? Did I mention the exotic removal days? Or the many days spent on Janes Scenic straightening and repairing and installing reflector posts? What about all the hours spent identifying and pressing plants for the herbarium?

I know I forgot many things, I hope they forgive me, but I have to stop now because it makes me tired just thinking about what two wonderful "Friends" have accomplished in a relatively short time. I hope Georgia knows what they're getting, because our loss is their gain. Fakahatchee Strand is a better place. Is there any doubt who made it so? What a great legacy. (Hey, guys, come on back, it's too cold up in those mountains. We all miss you dearly.)

OSCAR THOMPSON

Nature photographers, storytellers, gator hunters, friends and relatives mourn the loss of our good friend, Oscar Thompson. Oscar grew up in Everglades City and Immokalee, fourth generation of fishing guides and hunters. Oscar loved the Fakahatchee, where he used to hunt (when it was legal to do so, of course), and a bear skin from those days is displayed at the Preserve Visitor's Center, along with a picture of Oscar. Some of Oscar's photographs can be seen at the Ivey House gift store in Everglades City. He first introduced Clyde Butcher to the swamp, and we all know what that led to. Oscar lived and worked at Clyde Butcher's Big Cypress Gallery, where he often joined in or led groups on muck-about in the swamp.

An English Experience

The MO ZONE will return next issue. In its place is a little reminder from one of our FOF members of how lucky we are to have the Fakahatchee in our back yard. Many international visitors come to the Boardwalk each year. On some weekend days, Jerry Winters and Signe Backus have been welcoming people to the Boardwalk from all over the world, such as the Netherlands, England, France, Germany, and Mexico. The following is a letter from the Traylings, FOF members from England.

An English Experience of the Fakahatchee

In a lively and entertaining book entitled "Next Exit Magic Kingdom," author Roy Maclean describes an accidental visit to Florida. All too briefly, he mentions his journey westward along Alligator Alley looking for adult alligators in their undisturbed, natural habitat.

He would have had more success had he driven along the Tamiami Trail and walked along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, where he would have come into close contact with so much more than mere alligators from the natural world.

The Strand's botanist, Mike Owen, is mentioned in the book, but the author is not looking for a botanist: maybe had he really been seeking the heart of the Everglades he would have learned of the importance of the preservation of an entire ecosystem as opposed to that of an individual species.

With a little effort he could have reveled in the sense of achievement of completing a swamp walk, during which he might have seen the pine pink and crooked-spur orchid, a bird's nest fern, to say nothing of learning of the existence of the Fuzzy-wuzzy air plant.

He might have learned how the Fakahatchee Strand is truly the Grand Canyon of the Everglades, and also of the significance of October to the Strand. To his credit, the author did appreciate that the vast programs to tame the Everglades and to encourage development proved to be the most destructive division of water in history.

I have had the good fortune to visit the Strand several times over several years now. To my mind, its delight is that it can be explored formally, so to say, from the Boardwalk, with helpful explanatory scenic overlooks, or as an alternative, Janes Scenic Drive can be used as a starting point in order to walk off, suitably equipped, along one of the drive's gates and explore scenery resembling that of the Jurassic Period, as remote from the rest of the world as that era is from our own time.

All strength to the Friends of the Fakahatchee Strand in their work to preserve this very special corner of the world. (Touche! and thank you, Tony and Laurie)

P.S. MO reports that he has completed 110 out of 130 tram surveys. His goal is to complete the last 20 by the end of March. He must be accompanied by a volunteer, so if you are interested in helping him, please call 695-2886 to schedule a date. Be forewarned that the surveys are rather rigorous and usually last all day!

Also, Greg Toppin reports that a contract has been let for \$100,000 to remove B. pepper along I-75 from SR29 to Fakahatchee's west boundary, and it's already taking effect.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan. 25 (Sat) 11 a.m. Semi-Annual Membership Picnic at Gate 12, (Ballard Camp) Janes Scenic Dr., 6.5 miles N. of Preserve office
The main dish and sides are being furnished, so bringing a dish is optional this year. Perhaps your favorite dessert?
Swamp walks and buggy rides.

Feb. 1-2 (Sat-Sun) 10a-4p Seafood Festival Booth
Volunteers needed for 2-hr shifts to pass out information

Feb. 10 (Monday) 6:00 pm - Board & Membership Meeting
Everglades Comm. Church Annex
EVERYONE WELCOME

Feb. 11 (Tues) 8:30 am - Exotic Removal Day
Join us for our monthly exotic removal workday. Meet at the Preserve shop (behind office). Bring a lunch and plenty of water. Safety equipment, saws and chemicals provided. Subsequent workdays scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month until May.

Feb. 11 (Tues) 10am - Swamp Walk (and the second Tues. of each month for the season) Swamp Walk Committee Chairman Bill Mesce has arranged a series of swamp walks to be guided by FOF member John Elting. See rare plants and perhaps rare wildlife. Wear long pants, lace-up shoes or boots, and bring snacks and water. RSVP to Preserve Office at 239-695-4593.

Feb. 28 at dusk (rain date Mar. 1) Star Party!! Join us for our third annual Star Party hosted by the Everglades Astronomical Society. If you haven't seen the moon up close, or Saturn and its rings, or Jupiter and its moons, now is the time. By the way, Jupiter has rings, too, as wide as Saturn's but nearly invisible because they are dark. The Galileo spacecraft plunged and flew through the rings last November. Meet at Preserve Office at dusk, then to the quarry site.

Mar. 10 (Tuesday) 8:30 a.m. Exotic Removal & Swamp Walk — see Feb. 11 —

March 14-16 (Fri-Sun) Orchid Show Booth - Edison Comm. College - Volunteers needed - Call Kerrie @ 239-695-2974 to schedule. Workers see the show free.

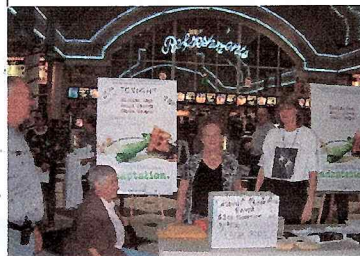
Trail Clearing Cont. Every Sun. & Mon. Through February - 8:30 am
Meet with FOF Jack Horner, Florida Trails Alligator Amblers, and a Park Ranger to clear trails. RSVP to Jack 239-267-8692 by Thursday prior to the scheduled workday.

Goodland Festival

Despite the bad weather, volunteers Vicky Nagle, Betty Foster, and Kerrie Chobot toughed out two days under the new pop-up booth in Goodland. Thank you, Bill Mesce, for providing the raffle prizes. Jan Sawitoski of Marco won the ghost orchid photo, Joannah Brunelli of Franklin, MA won the T-shirt, and Gail Barthel of Goodland won the orchid magnets. Congratulations!



Mixed Movie Reviews



Booth Volunteers Lee Russell, Vicky Nagle, Betty Foster, Barbara Lewinski

On Dec. 19, the FOF joined with the NORP group to sponsor a pre-release of the movie *Adaptation*, a spinoff of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, a book

about 94 orchids that were poached out of Fakahatchee Strand. The reviews in the newspaper are very good, but it has been difficult finding a FOF member with the same sentiment. Comments ranged from "it was very entertaining, better than I expected" to "that was a disgrace"! For sure, the best way to find out what it's all about is to go see it for yourselves, but leave the children at home. There is some language and subject matter unsuitable for youngsters. Any way you look at it, it did draw attention to Fakahatchee and its ghost orchids. You be the judge as to the merit of this publicity.

Buggy Drivers

On Dec. 4, eight FOF volunteers, Bob Barrows, Jack Horner, Denise Kofkoff, Bud Scott, John Wilson, Jerry Winters, and Jim and Niki Woodard, were trained by Preserve Manager Greg Toppin to drive the swamp buggy. The course included basic safety, loading and off-loading the trailer (which I understand is pretty scary), and a road test at the shop and then in the Preserve at the north end of Janes. On Jan. 14, Rangers Dave and Buddy, along with FOF volunteers Jerry Winters, Bud Scott, and Karen Relish tackled some Brazilian peppers out past Pennington Post. Thanks, everyone!



What We Are

The Friends of Fakahatchee is a Citizen Support Organization of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, an entity of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The Preserve comprises over 80,000 acres of land of the Big Cypress Swamp and is about 15 miles long and five miles wide, bordering US 41, I-75 and SR 29. The Fakahatchee Strand is the largest cypress strand in the world and its slough is the deepest in the greater Everglades.

Our address is: Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc., P.O. Box 548, Copeland, FL 34137

Phone: (941) 695-4593 Fax: (941) 695-4947 Visit our Website at: friendsoffakahatchee.org

Who We Are

Officers: President, Lee Russell, Port of the Islands; Vice-President, Patty Huff, Everglades City; Treasurer, Marilyn Russell, Port of the Islands; Secretary, Kerrie Chobot, Everglades City; **Board of Directors:** Franklin Adams, Everglades City; Howard Branch, Palmetto; Jan Brock, Ochopee; Nancy Fessenden, Naples; Betty Foster, Bonita Springs; Jack Horner, Fort Myers; Bill Mesce, Copeland; Vicky Nagle, Everglades City; Judi Pritchard, Bonita Springs; Russ Reay, Everglades City; Greg Toppin, Copeland